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New Zealand to Weigh Law Barring Nuclear-Armed Ships

Lange Backs Strong Ties With U.S.

By Jim Hoagland
and Don Oberdorfer
Washington Post Foreign Service

NEW YORK, Oct. 23—New Zealand Prime Minister David Lange said today that he will introduce legislation by early December to formally ban U.S. warships carrying nuclear weapons from visiting his country.

U.S. officials have asserted that such a step will sharpen the challenge that they believe New Zealand's policy of excluding nuclear weapons from its territory poses for the Reagan administration in managing alliances around the world. Enshrining that policy in law would trigger a further reassessment of military relations between the two nations, these officials say.

Lange laid repeated and heavy emphasis during an interview on his desire to continue strong defense ties to the United States.

"Our antinuclear policy is not an anti-American policy," he said. "It is impossible to be anti-American in New Zealand and be a political survivor." But he insisted that public sentiment in New Zealand dictates that these ties have to be on a nonnuclear basis.

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Stressing that New Zealand "is not nonaligned" and wants to continue to play a role with conventional forces in western defense of the Pacific, Lange praised the Reagan administration for its "honorable and disciplined" attitude in ruling out economic sanctions against his island nation.

He acknowledged, however, that decisions by the United States to curtail cooperation on intelligence matters and to halt joint military exercises had forced New Zealand to build up stockpiles of ammunition and take other steps that will add 120 million New Zealand dollars, or about $68 million, to defense spending this year.

Lange, a Methodist minister who led his Labor Party to victory in elections in July 1984, appeared buoyed by new public opinion polls that give his government unusually high approval ratings and strongly supporting its rejection of an American nuclear shield. But those polls also show strong public support for the defense ties to the United States embodied in the ANZUS defense treaty, which requires Australia, New Zealand and the United States to consult in the event of military attack.

Lange said that the United States and New Zealand had a good working relationship for 150 years, "and I don't want to be the prime minister of a government that blows it."

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